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ABSTRACT

This presentation offered counselors and therapists an opportunity to comment on the invisible aspects of anger in the workplace. An argument is made that anxiety is a foundational construct that supports rage, violence, and anger. An audience of 35 participants were asked to describe the one situation that best illustrated the most anger observed in a consumer. Participants were also asked to relate an example of the most extreme example of violence in the workplace. Violence was defined as an expression of anxiety and anger that had a specific target. Responses indicated that most providers encountered violence early in their professional careers. A literature review of findings in anger management is offered along with commentaries on play therapy and role play. Some examples of how counselors can address and actively manage anger in their agencies are given and numerous anecdotes of the consequences of pent-up anger are also related. Contains 19 references. (RJM)

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Running head: ANGER MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

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Anger Management in the Workplace

A Presentation to the Montana Association of Rehabilitation Conference

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Anger Management in the Workplace

Introduction

Practicing counselors and therapists were presented an opportunity to comment on the invisible aspects of anger in the workplace, defined as violence in the work place. Violence was considered as the visible or demonstrable aspect of anger. Studies for people involved in case management from as long as twenty years ago found that malpractice claims were consistently instigated by one issue (deGroot, 1994). That issue wasn't malpractice, high bills, incompetent, inability to communicate, gender differences; cultural differences; but, in fact, was anger. To keep violence and anger in context, a review of a spectrum can be conceptualized as moving from anxiety, anger, rage and violence (Azar, 1994; DeAngelis, 1994; Glaube, 1994; Sleek, 1994).

One way to separate the four concepts is to review concepts presented in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association-4th Edition (1994) as a clinical concept. Rage, violence, and anger are not mentioned, while anxiety is prominent in terms of clinical presentations. What follows, then, is an argument that the notion of anxiety is a foundational construct that supports the other three concepts.

An ability of a professional to consider, understand, and manage anger and/or anxiety in the work place, both for you and the agency for which you work has something to do with public perception. For instance, if you schedule something on the 8th of November and your supervisor schedules another activity and reminds you that missing that newly

scheduled event will not be tolerated, you will have an opportunity to express your anger and anxiety. Consumer research also shows a reason people support or maintain consumer loyalty may have more to do with what someone doesn't want rather than what is wanted. In a strange sort of way, if negative perceptions of one situation are less than the negatives of a second situation, regardless of what the positives are, an election is one, a product sold, or a promotion made. This notion of having fewer negatives rather than more positives has evolved over time.

Sam and Pat's Case

The following is a short case study that illustrates a type of anger management and what can transpire when management isn't what it could be (Barry, 1994). Sam and his wife Pat, when they reached Charleston, South Carolina, were prepared to make a few changes in the trip itinerary. They were going to visit an old family friend.

> Pat was driving and Sam was giving directions, and they got into an argument about which way she was suppose to go. For those of you who have ever navigated and/or driven you can understand what was going on here. (p.6)

Now if you don't understand how such a petty issue about which Exit number is going to be taken or when you are suppose to turn left or right, or as Mr. Berra said, "take the fork in the road." If you don't understand how such a minute issue can cause for such a giant argument, please consider what happened to the rest of the trip.

> So Pat decided, okay, if Sam was so good at directions, then he could drive the stupid car. She got out, she slammed the front door and opened the back door to get in with her two year old son Daniel. Then she decided, hey, why should she ride in the back like a kid, so she

slammed the back door, ready to get in the front, but before she could open the front, Sam, assuming she was in the car, drove off, leaving Pat standing all alone, at night, in Charleston, South Carolina, no money, in her traveling clothes: cut-off tee-shirt, mini skirt, no shoes. This part of Charleston, South Carolina turned out to be a very bad neighborhood and the first thing that happened was a voice from around the corner, no sooner than the tires squealed away. Meanwhile in the car, Sam was driving with great intensity and focus. Reading street signs, making left and right turns, knowing that he knew exactly where to go because he could show Pat. He didn't need her directions. It was not until he had gone a considerable distance, that he realized Pat was very quiet, uncharacteristically quiet. "Pat", he said, silence, "Daniel, um, um, is Mommy back there"? and Daniel said "No". "Okay Daniel, be calm," said Sam, performing a high speed turn and immediately became lost. His ability to retrace his lefts and rights and his exist numbers had completely disappeared. Meanwhile, back in this bad neighborhood in Charleston, South Carolina, Pat was walked briskly and found a bus station with a pay phone, managed to coax a quarter out of an admiring male, with lots of explanation and dialed 911. She talked to the 911 person, found out where the bus station was in Charleston, South Carolina, and the 911 operator said "Whatever you do, don't go outside." Pat was really relieved. Meanwhile, Sam was driving frantically while reminding Daniel to stay calm, and had located the general area where he left Pat, finally remembering the left and right turns and the approximate exit number where he left Pat. He saw a Police Officer, rushed up and told him quickly what

happened. The Officer said, "You left your wife here!!" Without another word the Officer leaped in the patrol car, tires squealing, and roared off to look for Pat. At the same time he put in a call to the coroner. Meanwhile at the other bus station, another officer sent by the 911 person found Pat who was explaining the situation. Pat's explanation went something like this: "Well, my husband and I were having a disagreement. " "Oh," said the Officer "This is a domestic". "No, no it is not a domestic--my husband and I were talking about exits and left and right turns and we started this discussion". The Officer said, " Yeah, it's a domestic." Pat said, "It's not a domestic!" Pat was taken to the police station where the officer called an old family friend who was the only person Pat knew in Charleston and explained the situation. The Officer began: "Well, I have this person named Pat here and I got her on a domestic". "This is not a domestic," said Pat. Fortunately, Sam had also called the same old family friend, he and Pat were united at the Police Station where Pat graciously elected not seek the death penalty. In fact she noted that this was not even a domestic. Everything worked out fine except to this day Daniel becomes mildly concerned whenever Mom steps out of the car. (p. 6)

Pat and Sam's experience can serve as an example for professionals in relationships with consumers about the importance of resolving anger. For example, using proven psychological techniques for dealing with conflict in relationships such as realizing that when you go on long car trips--ride in the trunk.

Method

An audience of thirty-five participants who attended the 1994 Montana Association of Rehabilitation were asked to describe the one situation that best illustrated the most anger observed in a consumer. Participants were also asked to relate an example of the most extreme example of violence in the workplace. Violence was defined as an expression of anxiety and anger that has a specific target. Additionally, providers of care were asked to relatively place the incidence of the most violent encounter with a client in terms of their career. Responses indicated that most providers encountered violence early in a professional career. Implications for education and training are significant.

Literature Review

For those of you that are interested in play therapy, White and Allers (1994) spent a lot of time studying the literature on play therapy. Additionally, they are interested, primarily, in validity and reliability issues. Play therapy affects anger in children and how play therapy can change anger attenuation in particular. The good news is there is a lot of research. The bad news is there is not much reliability or validity available for us. Those of you who have been involved in play therapy can say, "I think it works." But the research says that it works is difficult to find. Kids that have suppressed or experienced anger in situations where they aren't able to express it can begin that expression with play therapy techniques. But to help them manage that anger or help them understand better dealing with that anger, different kinds of techniques, the research says, so far, are not very available to us.

Jeffery Kottler (1994) comments on a couple of reasons why people who are very angry, in particular, should not be in any kind of a group relationship with a professional or other individuals. Or, probably, until that anger is dealt with first is interesting for us, in the rehabilitation business, shouldn't be in a one to one professional relationship. Now think about everybody you deal with in a counseling relationship who is not angry on a regular basis. Or do you find that everyone is angry about something? And that's usually the case.

Kottler and Mattson (1994), comment almost exclusively that until you can do something with the anger level, where the anger management or the anger understanding, the rest of the pieces you need to put in place, in terms of issues like informed consent, probably aren't going to be effective. That's a real challenge when explaining to people what's available or not available. Or, telling people that I understand what you want. Let's talk about some alternatives. Let's think about some choices that I can help you make. That may not be what you get to do next week. No, the taxi can't come this afternoon. They'll all be angry.

Lynn Landis and Mark Young (1994) present how to use role play on the part of professionals. That is in agency work or in your practices, what can you do to help yourself with your anger? Your peers with their anger? How can you help them manage that? The authors stay away from any kind of, interestingly enough, direct confrontation among peers. They say, probably from experience and research, the worst thing that can happen is for peers to directly confront each other about anger issues.

It struck me that we talked about in order to get a client to keep an appointment, you might threaten with the idea of to losing benefits. Could that be a reason, why you're angry? Avery and Woods (1994) approach to this is, much like Kottler's, not an appropriate way to deal with clients. Which for me, and a lot of the things I teach, is very different. Interesting article.

William Avery and Norma Woods (1994) talk about what do you do when you make someone angry? Let me rephrase it. You make someone angry. Not their environment, not something they can't control, something you say, something you do, or something you don't do or say. And you've made them angry in the context of a failed relationship. What's your responsibility as the professional, as the peer, as someone else in the agency? What's involved, usually, is misunderstanding, distortion, or misconduct. As quickly as possible, the failed relationship needs to be addressed and this is the one place where if you're responsible for the anger, you're responsible for taking the first step to try to fix it.

Donald Mattson (1994) presents some thoughts about death from aplastic anemia that going to happen to Donald two months after he's written this. I want you to hear it from the perspective of one person what anger can be. You know that anger after a client comes in and seems angry enough to spit nails. Or a coworker's comments about not believing that we aren't going to get another pay raise this year. I am so angry about that, don't they understand how hard we work?

One day a month I feel sorry for myself. I weep, I gnash my teeth, I'm tired of all this professional crap I have to put up with. I

talk about getting out of this business with everyone I know. My kids are in college now and I don't know if I can ever see them graduate. I don't know where the money is going to come from. All my kids need much more of a parent than I can ever be. Do I have enough insurance? Is it going to continue? What would happen if I quit? I know one day at a time is important--I am just out of days. The rest of my time I think I am upbeat. I think I will beat this thing. I give myself positive self talk. I continue to reach out and help others. Every now and then I bake some cheesecake and tell people at the office that this isn't so bad. I smile. I hope. Do I deny? No, I don't deny. I know that this is serious. I know this anger could be life threatening. But I have to do for myself what I would have my clients do for themselves. Change, believe, accept, go on, live, recover, overcome, whatever that choice is. The informal support group doesn't bring to mind at least one or two people with whom you are not in a personal relationship. If your informal support group doesn't say something where you are at work, or where you are in your recreation, I would ask you to reconsider if you have an informal support group at all. My informal support group brings me books, tapes, suggestions on visualizations, cards, gifts. Some tell me that it is going to be OK. My informal support group will cover for me, they teach me, they prop me up, they tell me I am OK. (pp. 375-378)

Is it possible the anger Donald Mattson describes, the anger about his death, is it possible that that kind of anger could actually inhibit our

performance as professionals and/or cause us physical, real physical problems?

Specifically, when it comes to anger and stress, could there be a relationship between your anger and physical health? And for those of you who really want to take something new back or, maybe, just some reinforcement. The word is glucocorticoid, an enzyme. And the researcher is Dr. Robert Zapolski from Stanford (Heminway, 1989).

Why is the glucocorticoid important for you as people who have to manage anger and anxiety? Following up on the work that Selye did on stress in late 1960s and early 1970s. There is a physiological response that is getting more and more documentation (Graham, 1990; Kopp & Skrabski, 1989; Tache & Selye, 1985). And unless you want to go to Stanford and have Dr. Zapolski tinker around with your neurons, figure out a way to, in your agency, manage stress better. Let me give you a couple of examples. Some things you might think about in terms of agency work, as best you can, do these on a regular training basis, in service, and present, you can develop these your own (Evans, Hearn, Uhlemann, & Ivey, 1989).

Those of you that have balloons and want to participate get ready. Anger management tends to happen two ways unless you actively participate. Those of you that want to participate and have a balloon, go ahead and put some air in yours. The first type of anger management, if you're not doing it, proactively, if you're not taking charge of it, sounds something like this. And those of you with balloons can all help me. You've done this before as a child many times, but you always want to do it as a big person though.**(audience holds end of balloon and releases a small,**

continuous amount of air in order to produce a high pitched, squeaky sound) That's what anger management sounds like in the work place when you don't do something about it. It sounds whiny. It sounds bitchy. It sounds like no fun. I can't tell you how many people have fingers in their ears for the rest of the day, because of that noise. That's a background noise you're going to have in your agency and in your profession, unless you do something about anger management, proactively, ahead of time, with some cases and some discussion. The second thing that will happen in anger management is just as much fun. Those of you with balloons can help me. If it's not managed properly, anger management happens like this. **(audiences releases reinflated balloons to randomly zoom around the room)**

Let me conclude with some notes on anger management by my favorite cowboy philosopher, poet, and large animal veterinarian, Baxter Black (1994).

> Talk about taking a beating and just being angry as hell, I stood on the porch at Dale's horse farm and soaked up the view. It was deep spring time in West Tennessee. The grass was so green. God, it was so green it hurt your eyes. The dogwoods were in bloom, and two sleek and shiny horses grazed in the picture. It looked like a cover off "Quarter Horse Journal", or Montana magazine or those calendars you get. God, it was great. "Nice fence," I commented, looking at the pole fence circling his pasture. It was one of those fences in perfect order, every rail, every nail in exactly the right place. Beautiful white contrast against the green. Dale decided to build his fence about three years ago and finally got around to it last December. He said, "I'll tell ya about that fence." I'll tell ya about Phil's anger. He

enlisted the aid of two friends, Chuck and Phil, all dressed warmly. Since the day they got started it was about 20 degrees. Now at that particular post and questioning, you know, it's the one by the mailbox right on the corner? Where all of that comes together. They were having trouble getting that hole dug, because it was close to paved road, it was packed pretty hard, and about 20 degrees didn't leave us much room. So, Dale backed up his tractor to the future hole and posed that post hole auger over the designated spot like an ovapositing wasp. The auger spun on the surface of the frozen ground. The auger spun on the surface of the frozen ground. The auger spun on the surface of the frozen ground. Now, Chuck, who was big as a skinned mule and just about as bright, pulled down on the gearbox. No luck at all. So, Phil stepped between the auger and the tractor and leaned his weight on the horizontal arm that was supporting the auger, for more leverage. Now, Phil had come prepared to work. Phil he was no dummy. He had on his hat with its Elmer Fudd earflaps; his Mud Boots; his extra warm, battery-powered socks; his woolly warm undies; extra longjohns on top made of that super polypropylene; his undershirt, cashmere of course; a wool shirt and of course his carharts. Now carharts for those of you who are more tropical Montanans are insulated coveralls made out of canvas and tough as a nylon tutu. Phil gave Dale the go ahead. Dale engaged the PTO. That's the power take off for those of you who are tropical Montanans. The auger clanked and started to turn and suddenly Phil, poor Phil, seemed to explode right in front of Dale's eyes. Dale engaged the clutch, slammed it as fast as he could in, everything stopped. Phil was angry. He stood before everyone quite

naked. Well, I said naked, no not quite, he had on his hat and his boots. He had on his belt , still through the loops. Now the jeans had ripped off from the pocket on down. Leaving only a small piece containing the fly and that flapped in the twenty degree temperature inexplicably. Now his explanation, Phil who was real angry had his pant leg brush up against the extended arm of the PTO and in a split second, as fast as Superman could skin a grapefruit, the PTO had torn all the clothes off of Phil's body. Even the cashmere t-shirt. In less than three minutes his body turned blue, nothing was broken but he was bruised as the top avocado at the supermarket. Chuck commented later that he'd looked like he'd been run through a hay conditioner. I figure he was a blazing example of that expression. He's mad as hell because he's been drug through a knot hole. (p.5)

Without your participation actively in anger management you're going to get drug through that knot hole much like Phil on a regular basis. In the places were you work, start thinking about active anger management and what you are going to do proactively.

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